

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY SOFIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8861

C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 2076

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, BU

SUBJECT: BULGARIANS PROTEST NYT ARTICLES ON BULGARIA

REF: A) STATE 244044; B) USINFO R042020; C) SOFIA 2034

1. ON NOVEMBER 14, CHARGE WAS CALLED TO MFA BY CHIEF OF EIGHTH DEPARTMENT AVRAMOV TO HEAR ORAL PROTEST ON NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLES WHICH APPEARED NOVEMBER 3 AND 4 AND WERE WRITTEN BY MALCOLM BROWNE. ALTHOUGH AVRAMOV READ PROTEST HE DID NOT HAND IT OVER TO CHARGE.

2. AVRAMOV'S PROTEST CENTERED ON ARTICLE WHICH HE SAID

APPEARED IN NYT ON NOVEMBER 3 AND WHICH ALLEGEDLY DESCRIBED PRESIDENT ZHIVKOV AS "SLAVISH" - TO WHAT AVRAMOV DID NOT SAY. HE ALSO EXPRESSED SURPRISE AND CONCERN THAT "EMBASSY CIRCLES" WOULD MAKE STATEMENTS WHICH CROWNE ATTRIBUTES TO THEM JOD AT TIME WHEN BOTH SIDES CLAIMED TO BE STRIVING FOR BETTER RELATIONS. RECOGNIZED THAT MANY ARTICLES CRITICAL TO POLICIES OF BOTH COUNTRIES APPEAR IN PRESS OF OTHER COUNTRY BUT CHARACTERIZED BROWNE'S ARTICLES AS GOING BEYOND ETHICAL LIMITS BY ATTACKING LEADERSHIP OF BULGARIA. SAID ARTICLES DID NOT CORRESPOND WITH PRESENT US OFFICIAL POSITION REGARDING BILATERAL RELATIONS.

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3. IN RESPONDING, CHARGE SAID SHE WOULD NOT DWELL ON

FACT THAT USG HAS NO CONTROL OVER US PRESS AND DOES NOT WISH TO HAVE SUCH CONTROL SINCE THESE FACTS WELL KNOWN TO AVRAMOV AND HIS GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, THIS IS NOT THE CASE IN BULGARIA WHERE PRESS IS A CONTROLLED ORGAN OF GOB. CHARGE SAID SHE HAD NOTICED SOME OBJECTION-ABLE ARTICLES IN BULGARIAN PRESS RECENTLY AND ONLY LAST NIGHT WATCHED ON TV A BROADCAST CARRYING EVENTS AT WORLD FEDERATION OF DEMOCRATIC YOUTH BEING HELD IN VARNA DURING WHICH SOME VERY UGLY THINGS WERE SAID BY NON-BULGARIANS ABOUT THE UNITED STATES. THE POINT, OF COURSE, IS THAT THESE REMARKS WERE CARRIED ON BULGARIAN TV, SHE ADDED. TURNING TO AVRAMOV'S SPECIFIC PROTESTS, CHARGE SAID SHE HAD SEEN ONLY ONE ARTICLE WHICH IF SHE RECALLED CORRECTLY, DID NOT MENTION PRESIDENT ZHIVKOV. REGARDING HIS SURPRISE AND CONCERN ABOUT COMMENTS ATTRIBUTED TO "EMBASSY CIRCLES", CHARGE SAID BOTH THE AMBASSADOR AND SHE HAD TALKED WITH BROWNE AND BOTH HAD GIVEN POSITIVE DESCRIPTION REGARDING IMPROVING BILATERAL RELATIONS. WE HAD, OF COURSE, ALSO DISCUSSED PROBLEMS WHICH CONTINUE TO EXIST IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. CHARGE ADDED THAT SHE PERSONALLY FELT BULGARIANS WERE PARTIALLY TO BLAME FOR SOUR TONE IN THE ONE ARTICLE SHE HAD READ BECAUSE BROWNE WHO REPRESENTS AN OUTSTANDING AND INFLUENTIAL AMERICAN NEWS-PAPER WAS UNABLE TO ARRANGE AN APPOINTMENT WITH EVEN ONE RESPONSIBLE BULGARIAN OFFICIAL DURING HIS STAY IN SOFIA. ADDED THAT IF BULGARIANS WISH TO HAVE THEIR POSITIONS REPORTED THEY SHOULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE PRESENCE IN SOFIA OF FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS SUCH AS BROWNE.

4. AVRAMOV JOTTED DOWN CHARGE'S COMMENTS ON TV COVERAGE OF VARNA MEETING BUT DID NOT COMMENT. HE DID AGREE THAT BULGARIAN OFFICIALS SHOULD RECEIVE MEMBERS OF FOREIGN PRESS AND PROMISED TO TRY TO BE HELPFUL IN THIS REGARD. AVRAMOV SAID THWH BULGARIAN PRESS WAS UNDER GOVERNMENT CONTROL BUT WE SHOULD NOT THINK THAT ALL ARTICLES WHICH APPEAR REPRESENT GOB POLICY AND/OR POSITION. CONCLUDED DISCUSSION WHICH REMAINED CORDIAL THROUGHOUT BY AGAIN STRESSING DAMAGE WHICH CAN BE DONE BY PRESS WHEN A CHIEF OF STATE IS ATTACKED AND REMINDED THAT NO AMERICAN CHIEF OF STATE HAS BEEN PUBLICLY ATTACKED IN BULGARIAN PRESS FOR CONFIDENTIAL

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PAST TWO OR THREE YEARS."

5. COMMENT: UNFORTUNATELY EMBASSY DOES NOT HAVE TEXT OF NOVEMBER 3 NYT ARTICLE IN WHICH BROWNE SUPPOSEDLY COMMENTED ON ZHIVKOV'S "SLAVISHNESS" PRESUMABLY TO THE USSR.(IF BROWNE MADE THIS COMMENT IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT MFA SHOULD PROTEST VIGOROUSLY SINCE ZHIVKOV IS OVERLY SENSITIVE TO SUCH CRITICISM.

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